

The First Sunday after Trinity

6 June, Anno Domini 2021

St. Luke 16:19-31

Pr. Kurt A Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

"You in your lifetime received your good things." And most certainly the rich man did. He never wanted for good, feasting sumptuously every day. He was successful in whatever his line of work was. He was wrapped in the best and finest you could imagine, wearing the clothes of royalty. He put in long hours at the office. He probably tithed more than was demanded by the Law. He was well-respected and received by everyone who knew him.

Yet for all this, in spite of every outward sign that seemed evidence enough of God's approval, the rich man had absolutely nothing and even that was taken from him as he was cast into the unquenchable anguish and emptiness of eternal judgment. For every one of his neighbors who praised him, for all his accomplishments, for all the honor and attention that the world lavished upon him and which he lavished on himself, he was refused by the God of father Abraham. Jesus doesn't even know his name.

What Jesus lays before us in the rich man is absolutely crucial for us to know and exercise ourselves in every day. You know because it comes so naturally, that man wants to judge by what is outward and visible to the eyes. We are impressed with smart people, people declared to be experts with titles or podcasts or television shows, people who seem very religious and pious, people who have done well for themselves, people who are nice and love us. We are impressed by numbers and excitement, programs and business. After all, every bit of wealth and earthly comfort comes from God. Certainly God wouldn't lavish such gifts on someone who doesn't deserve them. Why would God gives such good things to scoundrels and wicked people?

Repent. That is not the God of Holy Scripture. That is the god of the rich man. That is a god of your own making - the god who gives good things to people we consider good and bad things to those we judge to be bad. The god whose love and favor can be judged by things as temporary and worthless as your wallet,

your closet, your garage, your blood tests is a god made in your own image and who judges as you do.

Do you have your good things already? Have the desires of your heart been satisfied because you don't have any debts; because your kids excel academically or athletically; because people look up to you and are amazed by your depth of character; because you're not sick; because the "right" people are sitting in positions of power; because you have full exercise of all your constitutional rights? Are you content simply because at the moment your suffering is minimal? Are you content because your little pile of not-so-good works seems to shine a little more and stink a little less than your neighbor's? Have you already received the things that you value as good?

Or is your heart filled with discontent? Do you think you are being punished because you are sick or because death has come near and taken those you love? Do you grumble and complain because the disciplining rod of the Father has fallen upon you, because your piece of the economic pie has shrunk or the money has stopped flowing completely? Do you desperately cling to your things because in your heart of hearts they are your proof of God's love? Learn again from the rich man. The riches and pleasures of this world are deceitful and are very easily pressed into the devil's service to lure your heart away from the things of God, like a trail of bread crumbs leading you to hell.

Jesus today exposes how misplaced and shallow our judgments are. What our eyes and broken reason might judge as a man of great faith, who has been blessed by God for his faith and righteousness, Jesus exposes as a wicked, godless man whose heart was fixated only on himself and his belly. The outcome of this story would have shocked everyone who knew these men. But the proof is in the pudding. The rich man despised God with all his heart. He despised God's mercy and so he had none to show to Lazarus lying in need at his gate. He believed he himself needed nothing and so despised those who did need. Certainly he wasn't punished for his wealth. Many of the faithful have been rich - Queen Esther, Abraham, David, Solomon and many others. It wasn't even his lack of love for which he was condemned. That was only proof of that he didn't believe in God's love for him. He was judged because he wanted things, He didn't want God. He didn't acknowledge his own beggarly condition before God as one whose heart was full of hatred, lust, and idolatry and empty of any righteousness.

But neither was Lazarus saved by his poverty and suffering. That is exactly what this story from our Lord is NOT about. Just as the riches of the rich man were not the measure of his faith, Lazarus' poverty proved nothing, only that he was poor. And therein really lies the point. We would never know of Lazarus' salvation except for Jesus revelation of it. He could have just as easily ended up in hell with the rich man. He was just as much a sinner. The sins of his life may have been different but they were as worthy of judgment as the rich man's.

The way in which Jesus tells the story is as important as the story itself. The earthly condition of neither man reveals anything. Riches and poverty alike come from the same God. He alone gives and He alone takes away. Only one thing then could possibly distinguish these two men and explain their eternal conditions. Faith. Faith in the words and promises of God. The desires of their hearts which were revealed only in death. What it was that each man found comfort in and placed his trust in was completely veiled to human judgment and wisdom. For the rich man, as we said, as father Abraham said and which the rich man never denied, his love was for his wealth. His good things were the things of the world and with those he was satisfied. On the other hand, Lazarus' salvation is evidence that his refuge alone was in God. He was satisfied with the abundance of God's mercy, mercy that had been promised to him by the Prophets, even though he was left to starve and rot in whatever disease plagued his body. He confessed his unworthiness before God and claimed no right to any blessings, heavenly or earthly. The treasures of his heart were eternal. He clung fast to the promises of God's mercy, the Messiah who would come and finally deliver him. He didn't despise his crosses. He didn't grumble about how unfair life was and how the rich man owed him a share in his possessions. He was a beggar in every sense of the word. In all things he sought mercy. He was satisfied with God's promise to give him his food in due season. He demanded nothing, placing his trust in what God had spoken through Moses and the prophets.

Have you received your good things in this life? Or does your heart long for something eternal? Does it desire nothing more than the love and mercy of your heavenly Father who has made you an heir of His divine and eternal kingdom? Are you as equally satisfied with your hunger as you are with being full because in either situation you are with Christ, because you are in the bosom of Abraham who believed God and was counted righteous?

You, adopted by God as His beloved child have been blessed with everything, absolutely everything necessary for your eternal salvation. What your Father has given cannot be taken from you by poverty, Satan, or even death. It is worth far more than anything this world could ever hope to offer you. You have been given the very life of God Himself. You have heard Moses and the Prophets and flowed their fingers which pointed to the One who humbled Himself by taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. He became nothing, the true Lazarus, satisfied only with the Word of His Father, so that He might make you eternally rich, so that you may have peace with God, so that you no longer need to fear the eternal fires.

As Lazarus lay there, he had no fear, not because he loved God so much, but because God loved him and drove away from Lazarus every cause for fear. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" No one can bring judgment against you because Jesus has already endured it for you. He looked upon you with mercy and compassion and didn't just toss you table scraps like a good job, a good marriage, or good kids. Rather, He has prepared for you a feast of rich food and the finest wine. He Himself has stepped down from heaven to secure for you and now feed to you the bread that comes down from heaven, His own Flesh and Blood that you may eat and be satisfied with God's love and mercy. He binds up your wounds by the word of forgiveness poured out of the lips of His servants and keeps you safely here, in Abraham's bosom, the Church, where His comfort and His promises are proclaimed to all beggars - rich and poor alike who long for the true riches of God. Here you are assured of your deliverance from every evil of body and soul. Here you are kept safe until the day when your faith, hope, fear, death, sorrow, gold, silver, and all your temptations will all pass away and all that will remain for God's children is His love for you and the joy of looking upon your Redeemer and Lord face to face. Here you are made eternally rich.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.